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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses resistance in education as expressed in white working-class girls' reactions to sex role socialization, children's play, minority children's behavior in inner city schools, and the resistance of female faculty in institutions of higher education. The paper takes off from issues addressed in some papers presented at a research symposium on resistance in education. Observing that some of the papers draw on Eugene Genovese's conceptualization of accommodation and resistance in explaining slavery, the author cautions against uncritically accepting Genovese's interpretation. Genovese's use of the idea of paternalism to explain slavery and the slaves' widespread accommodation and weak resistance to slavery is thought to ignore important factors such as racism and the sexual exploitation of slave women. It is suggested that Genovese tends to view slave resistance as an attribute of personality rather than as a collective and individually conscious phenomenon with political and economic implications. The author of this paper shows how the broader interpretation of resistance applies in the educational situations described in J. Anyon's paper on cultural influences in working-class girls' resistance, Nancy King's analysis of children's play as a force for altering school social relations, and Marcella Lingham's discussion of minority children's resistance behavior in the instructional process. It is suggested that information on resistance in education would be useful in promoting equality for minorities in education. (Author/MJL)

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THE IDEA OF RESISTANCE IN EDUCATION: A CRITIQUE

by

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Introduction

Resistance in education involves trying to understand the process of change, the nature of causality and participating in the "forward motion of history" (Aptheker 1978, O. xii). I believe that what is being resisted in the educational arena are various forms of cultural imperialism, ideological hegemony in the curriculum and rigid, though sometimes hidden, reproductive processes in the social relations and structure of schooling which are intimately connected to the social formation of the world-wide capitalist system.

The forms of resistance in education which this symposium addresses include white working-class girls' resistance to sex-role socialization (Anyon 1982); children's play as a form of resistance (King 1982); minority children's resistance to reading instruction in inner-city schools (Lingham 1982); and the resistance of female academics in higher educational institutions (Miller 1982). These papers demonstrate that resistance to domination in society and education can and does take many forms, not the least of which is scholarship which seeks to promote social transformation and personal agency. In this sense a symposium which addresses resistance in education is itself a kind of "cultural action" for freedom in the "Big House".

I heartily embrace both the radical intentions and the world view that is presupposed in the papers presented in this symposium: "that people are not automatons" but are capable of "making the world anew" (Anyon 1982). In addition to the specific comments I will make about each paper, I will also discuss issues which I think relate most directly to the emancipatory and creative possibilities of these analyses. For example, in order to demonstrate the way one's conception of human nature influences one's ideas about resistance, I will address the problem of uncritically accepting the conceptualization of accommodation and resistance which Anyon and King borrow from Eugene Genovese's interpretation of

slavery and black resistance. It is important to point out the pivotal role of race, class and gender in understanding both resistance and the reciprocal nature of social relations.

I start from the premise that the basic purpose of social research is as Markovic proposes: to build "a critical consciousness that helps a society in a given situation to become aware of its optimal historical possibilities and to take practical steps for their realization" (Markovic 1980, p. 46). This is clearly a non-neutral position. Markovic delineates four elements which ought to be of concern to social science which are well-represented in this symposium:

1. A serious study of "What is".
2. The next question ought to be "Why"?

Markovic states that "what ever there is must be both explained in terms of certain regularities of overt behavior and structural set-up and understood in terms of subjective and inter-subjective aspirations, intentions, beliefs, and frustrations" (page 49).

3. The next question, then is "What could be?" What is the potential for the future and what are the most probable possibilities?

But to know what could be requires a thorough and critical understanding of the past. For Markovic research which answers such questions will provide "positive knowledge, the moment of consciousness about a given social reality". There is an even more important question in so far as social change is to be a product of such scholarly activity:

4. To whom would this positive knowledge be useful? For emancipatory or repressive interests, for creative or destructive purposes?

I conclude my remarks by suggesting an emancipatory role for research which could function as a "democratic pedagogy for critical self-consciousness". This is one

of the creative possibilities suggested by these perspectives on resistance in education. This critique is offered to move the dialogue about resistance forward in order to better understand what is, why it is, and what could be.

Accommodation or Enforced Subordination

Both Anyon (1982) and King (1982) rely on Genovese's characterization of black slave accommodation and resistance to highlight processes in education which reflect white working-class girls' neither total acceptance nor total rejection of the social ideology of female inferiority and sex-role socialization and children's resistance to the structure of authority in elementary school classrooms. While this analogy may be heuristically useful and provocative, we should be aware of some of its limitations.

Needless to say, this is not the first time that women's social inequality has been compared with the oppression of blacks. "Mill girls" of the emergent Northern working class during the turbulent 1830's experienced a form of economic oppression which was often equated with slavery. Early feminists, perhaps for shock effect, even described marriage as "slavery". Angela Davis warns us in her most recent analysis of "women, race and class" that such an "identification of the two institutions also implied that slavery was no worse than marriage". Thus we need to be careful when seeking insights about social phenomena by making comparisons across class, race and gender lines.

Schools have been compared with "total institutions" such as prisons and mental hospitals which are characterized by dependency and paternalistic relations between authority persons and inmates. Genovese uses the term "paternalism" as a pivotal construct to explain slavery and black accommodation and resistance. However, this concept may be more illuminating when it is applied to gender

relations or the structure of authority in schools than when it is used to depict slavery as it was institutionalized in the West and particularly in America.

It is a gross oversimplication of historical fact to characterize the heinous crimes perpetrated during the two hundred years of American slavery as simply a form of paternalism. Such a conceptualization gives too little attention to other equally important factors such as the virulent racism and the sexual exploitation of women who were slaves. Black women slaves were oppressed at least as much as a result of the antebellum conceptions of femininity, womanhood, and white racism as by the ideology of paternalism. The problem is both conceptual and methodological. It needs to be pointed out that Genovese's conclusions, however well-intentioned, are still open to debate.

In arguing that paternalism effectively disguised the true nature of slavery and enmeshed both the master class and African slaves in a dependency relation about which the masters felt little guilt and to which the slaves accommodated themselves in the process of constructing a viable social life as slaves, Genovese contradicts himself and offers us as a social construction of reality which obscures the historical record. Genovese too easily dismisses the slave rebellions which did occur as empirically insignificant and relegates them to a mere symbolic importance. But, according to Aptheker, such a focus on the reasons for widespread accommodation to slavery, which is what Genovese is concerned to explain, is "the business of historians of the status quo". In his view it was not accommodation at all: it was "domination, enforced subordination". This is not a simple matter of a choice of words. On the contrary, different interpretations of historical fact often belie important differences in assumptions about human nature and social reality that are not easily perceived.

Anyon makes the very important point that language affects the way we think about the world. More important still, the "words we use to describe reality" as Rubem Alves suggests, partly determine "how we experience the world around

us" and "ultimately condition what we do" (Alves 1972, p. 38). The examples of Genovese's analysis which follow demonstrate the need to analyze preconceptions about human nature and the social order which may limit our thinking. Such preconceptions are the basis of socially constructed ideologies which people are struggling to resist. For example, we call the process of cultural conditioning that is education "socialization". In actuality, to be socialized often means to uncritically accept the status quo. But, as Maxine Greene argues, the "need for emancipation and for human freedom is deeply rooted in human beings and no deceptive claim can quite satisfy the longing people have to be self-determining, to be free" (Greene 1977, p. 32). We can observe this need for emancipation in the papers presented in this symposium. To understand the process of change and the potential for what could be our analysis should focus on both the "socially constructed reality" as well as individuals' biographies. Genovese uses the concept of paternalism to explain why black resistance did not go "much further", so he can not address the more critical line of inquiry which would seek to identify the sources of resistance which occurred. His treatment of the problem of accommodation and resistance, especially his characterization of the black woman's experience, is problematic precisely because it limits our critical consciousness of the role black men and women played in resisting, not just paternalism, but racist class and sexual oppression as well.

Blassingame (1976) observes that "by always beginning his discussion with the way the master defined a situation, Genovese limited his ability to see how the slave defined it". Perhaps this accounts for the differences we find in Genovese's and other scholars' accounts of the black woman's slave experience. It is interesting to note in this regard that the Index to Genovese's Roll, Jordan, Roll does not refer to the black or Negro woman as such, but only to her various roles in the slaveocracy as wives, mothers, mammies, concubines, as objects of the sexual division of labor and what he refers to as "miscegenation". Compare

Genovese's version of "life in the Big House" with Angela Davis' analysis of the sexual exploitation of black women during slavery. For Genovese:

> "The plantations hardly emerge from statistics looking like harems of abolitionist fantasy." (p. 415)
>
> "Many white men who began taking a slave girl in an act of sexual exploitation ended by loving her and the children she bore."
>
> "The tragedy of miscegenation lay, not in its collapse into lust and sexual exploitation, but in the terrible pressure to deny the delight, affection and love that so often grew from tawdry beginnings." (p. 419)
>
> "The sexual exploitation of black women, however outrageous, will startle no one. The problem is to explain why it did not go much further. The resistance of the women and their men, important as it was, does not provide a full explanation for the restraint shown by so many whites which also must be accounted for."

On the other hand, Angela Davis has this to say about the sexual exploitation of black women during slavery:

> "In the same way that rape was an institutionalized ingredient of aggression carried out against the Vietnamese people, designed to intimidate and terrorize the women, slaveowners encouraged the terroristic use of rape in order to put Black women in their place." (Davis 1981, p. 24)

Kate Wittenstein and Darlene Hine (1981) argue that Genovese's emphasis on the "mammy's manipulation of her favored position" in the Big House neglects the more important question of "how it must have felt to nurse and raise her future oppressors" (p. 290).

These scholars give much more credence to the political nature of collective social life among the slave population than does Genovese. They present a convincing case that black women's resistance to slavery and sexual exploitation was not only collective and individually conscious, but had political and economic implications as well. They assert that the slave woman understood the

value of her labor and the economic value of her sexual exploitation and that it was the activities of "consciously political black women" which intertwined the theme of resistance throughout the fabric of everyday resistance to slavery (Davis 1971, p. 15).

Are we to conclude as Genovese implies that only "madmen" could challenge the system of slavery in the antebellum south? What concrete conditions and factors account, not just for white restraint, but for the emergence of individuals with ethically alternative conceptions of the world even as they "accommodate to what appears as if it can not be changed and appropriate or resist what appears changeable"? Where are the seeds of change? These are questions which are extremely vital to our understanding of resistance in education and gender relations as well.

Admittedly, Genovese has produced a scholarly work of major proportions. But he chooses to focus on the problem of the weakness and limited extent of slave revolts rather than the conditions which gave rise to personal and collective acts of rebellion. By consistenlty referring to rebellious slaves as "spirited" or "more spirited", for example, he gives the impression that resistance was merely an attribute of personality. A serious study of history teaches us, however, that both individual as well as historical forces are important in the generation of change (Mardlee 1977). This is precisely the position Anyon takes in her discussion of working-class girls resistance to the ideological notions of female inferiority. It is clear that she has transcended this limitation which I find in Genovese's Roll, Jordan, Roll.

Cultural Resistance

The intersection of individual biography with socially constructed reality and social contradictions often occurs at the point of cultural activity. The idea of resistance in education suggests many connections with political struggles

for social and economic justice in other contexts and social settings. Not only can comparisons be made with resistance to slavery, but there are also implications to be understood from analysis of national liberation movements in the Third World. Just as black students and women have challenged the epistemology of American education, students in Africa are now engaging in strikes to protest the outmoded colonial system of education.

I wonder if Anyon's description of how women and working-class girls "appropriate" aspects of femininity as a means of resistance exemplifies the notion that colonized people resist imperialism and domination "culturally". Nina Caulfield and, the revolutionary leader, Amilcar Cabral, as well as others, have written of how colonized people develop resistance strategies "centering around new forms of cultural affirmation" (Caulfield 1974). And in spite of the position Genovese takes on the matter of slave religion, it has been asserted that black spirituals "were the slave's description and criticism of his environment" and "the key to his revolutionary sentiments and to his desire to fly to free territory" (Cone 1972, p. 14).

An understanding of the role of culture in resistance presupposes an adequate explication of the significance of class, race and gender. Anyon's propositions for a more valid and integrated theory of the development of gender roles acknowledges the importance of these factors. In the interest of explanations that are neither partial nor distorted by bias, she also emphasizes the need to take wider social and cultural contexts into account.

In Nancy King's paper on "Children's Play as a Form of Resistance" we have an insightful and concise analysis of both possibilities and the limitations of children's play for altering the social relations in the classroom and the school. It would be interesting to consider this question from the perspective of the impact of social class. Certainly, lower-class children's play will necessarily reflect their integration in an alternative culture. However, lower-class children

are often perceived by teachers as being "not quite ready" for learning (Gay 1975; Hale 1981). Teachers who view lower-class children as "culturally deprived" presume they need some "socialization" before they can be effectively taught. Moreover, certain schools and neighborhoods also have "reputations" which might tend to support extended subversive activity on the part of the children. It would also be important to consider the process of negotiating classroom social relations over time, both within a single classroom and as children progress through their elementary school careers. Not surprisingly, a common concern in lower-class schools is the fact that by the third grade the children seem to "turn off" to schooling.

Marcella Lingham (1982) reports some convincing and familiar descriptions of minority children's efforts to avoid the loss of social status and self-esteem which might accompany the experience of failure to learn to read. There may be a variety of other factors involved as well. Why do these particular children (and not all) engage in resistance behaviors such as looking for books and other ways of forestalling instruction? What differentiates these children from the others who are more successful and trusting of the educational process? Research has explored the relationship between peer group involvement and school success for black youth and Black English and reading ability (Labov 1969). Are trusting relations possible when the student's language is rejected by the instructional process? Are these children resisting cultural domination as well when they avoid the challenge of learning to read? It is important to account for this historical reversal in the black educational experience.

Forms of cultural resistance might be explained in terms of both teacher and student self-conceptions and identification with professional and sub-cultural values, respectively. For instance, Levy describes "class warfare" in a "ghetto school" where teachers who "see their efforts to control the children as consistent

with their values" and definitions of "professional standards" accept the notion that "control must precede education" (Levy 1970, p. 26). In contrast to these "chronic teachers", Levy observed a different type of teacher for whom the "military techniques and methods of violence" used to control the children conflict with the acute teacher's "moral codes" and "suburban past" (Levy 1970, p. 40). Consequently, the acute teacher makes efforts to "bargain with the children". This chapter concludes with the heading, "The acute teacher is destroyed.". Levy's participant observer account of warfare in this school describes children who are active participants in a "counter-world" that is both racially and socio-economically defined. At the same time, the "chronic teachers" also find coherent ways to maintain a particular existence that is distinct and meaningful from their point of view. We need more studies which take participants' viewpoints and knowledge of their reality seriously. King suggests that children do not necessarily recognize the potential of their experiences outside the classroom for altering the structure of social relations. But we need not conclude that childrens' cultural activity or play does not, in fact, provide them with alternative experiences even if not consciously engaged in.

The Possibility: Research as a Democratic Pedagogy for Critical Self-Consciousness

These papers have implications for how we study these problems, how we teach about them and who will benefit from their analysis. The insights from this kind of research on resistance in education has the potential to demystify prevailing ideologies and could serve a pedagogical function to stimulate democratic action for social change. After reading Janet Miller's moving account of her personal struggle to overcome the fragmentation and alienation of consciousness, I wondered what knowledge of other women's actions and committments could better prepare

women in academia to cope with and to move forward with the historical possibility of women's equality. Women's studies and Black studies include the tradition of struggle to this end. It needs to be emphasized that women and other people's resistance has been consciously collective and political. The study of such historical and contemporary struggles should identify individuals' experiences as well as the social, cultural and economic contexts and contradictions which "loosen the bonds on the possible".

How for example, is Janet Miller's experience as a feminist in male-dominated academia different from Prudence Crandall's experience in the 1830's when she defied a racist mob to teach black children and in so doing rejected the traditional attitudes concerning the conduct of a white lady? (Davis 1981, p. 35)? Angela Davis asks: "Where did this young Quaker woman find her extraordinary strength and her astonishing ability to persevere in a dangerous situation of daily siege?" I suggest that this kind of question is a proper subject for a participatory process of research and teaching which could engage the academician, students lay persons in mutually reinforcing knowledge production and critical inquiry about everyday resistance. Would such "positive knowledge" about our contemporary and historical realities help women like Janet Miller in the struggle to differentiate the "constructed realities" of our time from their own realitites and visions of the world as it could be? How might knowledge about women like Prudence Crandall affect working-class girls' and women's self-conceptions? How would working-class girls' aspirations be affected by the knowledge that the ideological notion of "housewife as a finished historical product has only been constructed within the last century" (Davis 1981, p. 225).

We need to be on guard against accepting a cynical and ideological version of our history. To do otherwise would mean participating in our own debilitation and self-deception. These papers call into question the view that women, blacks or students are in no position to question the dominant hegemony.

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